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THE ELEPHANT AND ITS IVORY IN ANCIENT CHINA

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FEW MAMMALS, probably, have so forcibly impressed themselves upon the imaginations of the peoples coming in contact with them as has the elephant. Living, he has not only been the noblest of big game animals, but has shown himself susceptible of taming and of utilization in a variety of ways for the purposes of peace, of war, and of religion. Dead, his ivory has been eagerly sought after, and from palæolithic times has formed one of the principal media for the expression of the æsthetic impulses of the artist. It would seem, in fact, that the ancient trade in ivory has not as yet had accorded to it the study which it merits. Trade of a sort, more often than not probably of an intermittent, tribe-to-tribe variety, has of course been going on the world over, from an extremely early period; and in the long run it has no doubt played a more important part in the diffusion of culture elements than any other agency. Early commerce, however, in the very nature of the case was always restricted to certain very definite classes of objects—those, namely, which combined in themselves the qualities of high value, of durability, and of easy transport. Among such were amber, jade, spices, and silk. Such, too, in a preëminent degree, was ivory.

In view of the really great importance of the ivory trade in all ages, it seems rather curious that so little attention has been paid hitherto to the distribution of the elephant in protohistoric and early historic times. It is the purpose of this paper to present a brief synopsis of the available data concerning the Asiatic elephant and the traffic in its ivory during the earlier historical periods in regions where it has now disappeared, and particularly in ancient China.

We are indebted for our first definite notices of the elephant in western Asia to the Egyptian monuments, and especially to those of the XVIIIth Dynasty. These not only mention ivory, both in the tusk and in the form of manufactured articles, among the items of tribute and booty brought to Egypt as a result of the Syrian expeditions of the Pharaohs; but the living animals themselves are spoken of more than once in the same connection.

Thothmes II, for example, received elephants brought to him by his Syrian tributaries, a fact which indicates not merely that the animal existed in western Asia but that it was already being tamed.¹ Again, a little later, Thothmes III is recorded as having slain no less than a hundred and twenty elephants, for the sake of their ivory, in a great hunt in the land of Nifi, in northern Syria, not far from the great bend of the Euphrates; the killing of so large a number on a single occasion indicates that the creature must then have occurred in considerable herds.²

It may be suggested in this connection that perhaps the area under discussion was inhabited not by the Asiatic but by the African elephant. For we know that Egypt itself was the home of the latter in predynastic times;³ and it is comparatively but a short distance from the valley of the Nile to northern Syria. This suggestion, however, is definitely negatived by the manner of representing the Syrian elephant on the monuments, where it is clearly shown with the high concave forehead and small ears of the Asiatic type, as distinct as possible from the low convex skull and enormous ears of the African form.⁴

The Assyrian notices, dealing with a period somewhat later, tell much the same story. Tiglath-Pileser I (*ca.* 1100 B.C.) tells us that he killed ten elephants and took four alive in the Haran region, along the middle Euphrates, not so very far, in fact, from the scene of the great hunt of Thothmes III on the other side of the same river nearly four hundred years earlier.⁵ Again, in the first half of the 9th century, elephants are mentioned among the animals kept in the menagerie of Ashur-nazir-pal at Kalhu.⁶ Additional and extremely interesting information regarding the former distribution of the Asiatic elephant is also given by the famous Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser II, dating from about the middle of the same century. This monument enumerates among the articles of tribute received from the countries of Yakin and Adini, near the head of the Persian Gulf, both ivory and

¹ Dr. J. H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt* (New York, 1905), p. 271.

² Breasted, *op. cit.* p. 304.

³ Breasted, *op. cit.* p. 130.

⁴ Cf. *Revue d'ethnographie*, No. 3 (1884), p. 281; also Gaston Maspero, *The Struggle of the Nations* (London, 2nd edit., 1910), p. 285.

⁵ A. T. Olmstead, in *JAOS* 37. 177.

⁶ Olmstead, *JAOS*, 38. 250.

elephant skins.⁷ These items, and particularly the latter, would suggest that the elephant was native to those regions; but on the other hand they might conceivably have been imported overseas from India, so that this evidence is not quite decisive for the former existence of the elephant there. About another statement upon this same monument, however, there can be little doubt. Among the various items of tribute from the land of Musri are mentioned living elephants. Now Musri has, it is true, been somewhat variously located; but in this instance it is apparently to be identified with a region lying somewhere to the northeast of the center of the Assyrian power, and not far from the southern extremity of the Caspian Sea. Most writers who have touched upon this question have taken it for granted that these elephants must somehow have been obtained ultimately from India, merely because that is the nearest land where elephants are now found. That this assumption is a wholly gratuitous one need scarcely be said. Fortunately we have independent confirmation of the Assyrian statements regarding the occurrence of elephants in the south Caspian region. Ancient Persian traditions embodied in the *Sháhnáma* speak of the hero Rustum killing numerous elephants in battle in Mazanderan, in the course of his war with the king of that country.⁸ With the fullest possible allowance for the un-historical character of these legends; yet, taken in connection with the Assyrian statements, they surely render it probable, if not certain, that, as Sir John Malcolm suggested long ago,⁹ elephants must once have abounded in the warm, humid, and well wooded country about the southern shores of the Caspian Sea.

Of the vast importance of the part played by ivory in the æsthetic life of the ancient peoples of Mediterranean and Mesopotamian regions it is unnecessary to speak here. Much of this ivory we know was drawn from Africa and from India; but part of it, at least in the earlier periods, was undoubtedly of western Asiatic origin, as in fact the monuments show to have been the case in Egypt.

⁷ Cf. article by Rev. V. Scheil on 'The Inscriptions of Shalmaneser II,' in *Records of the Past*, N. S., No. IV., p. 79; also Rev. Wm. Houghton, 'On the Mammalia of the Assyrian Sculptures,' *Transactions of the Society of Biblical Archaeology*, vol. V. (1877), p. 348.

⁸ *Sháhnáma* (Trübner's Oriental Series), vol. 2, p. 73 *sq.*

⁹ Col. Sir John Malcolm, *The History of Persia* (2 vols., London, 1815), vol. 1, p. 35 and note.

Exactly when the elephant finally disappeared from western Asia, although it had apparently done so well before the middle of the first millennium B.C., we do not know. We hear nothing more of its occurrence there for some centuries, until the battle of Gaugamela, in 331 B.C., when an Indian contingent from the west bank of the Indus is recorded to have brought with it fifteen elephants.¹⁰ As a result of the conquests of Alexander the Great, the custom of using elephants in war was borrowed for a season in western regions; but the animals thus employed were all drawn at first from India, and, later on, to some extent from northern Africa, where, although now extinct, the species still survived for some centuries after the beginning of the Christian Era. Indirect evidence of the fact that the elephant had entirely disappeared from those countries in Asia west of India in which it formerly occurred is afforded by the marches of Alexander himself; for as it happens, the route followed by him led through every one of those regions, and yet we hear nothing as to wild elephants being found by him in any of them.

The history of the elephant in India does not fall within the scope of this paper. It is worth remarking, however, that a people called the Seres are mentioned by classical writers as being great elephant users, while the same name was undoubtedly that by which the ancient Chinese were best known to the western world. Greek and Roman writers, from the time of Ktesias downward, mention the Seres repeatedly, in a large proportion of instances in such a way as to indicate conclusively that the people whom they had in mind were the Chinese. That the name was also applied to various Indian peoples, however, is beyond doubt; and it was the latter clearly who were the elephant users—not the Seres of China.

Of any occurrence of the elephant in ancient times in the regions north of India and Iran there is practically no evidence. As will presently appear, the creature once existed, and that well within the historical period, in western China, in an area adjoining what is now the arid Central Asiatic region. And as has been seen it was also in all probability once found at the opposite extremity of this desert belt, in the district around the southern end of the Caspian. Granted that former greater degree of humidity which seems to have prevailed in this now dry central zone, there is no

¹⁰ Arrian, *Anabasis*, Bk. 3, ch. 8.

reason apparently why the elephant might not then have extended from northern Iran right around to western China, through the basins of the Oxus, the Jaxartes, and the Tarim. But direct evidence that this was actually the case is wanting. True, there are various references to elephants in connection with this region, some of them legendary, others undoubtedly historical. In the *Sháhnáma*, for instance, we are told that one of the allies of Afrasiyab, the king of Chín (which has been conjecturally identified with the ancient Chinese state of Ch'in, occupying the modern Shen-hsi and Kan-suh),¹¹ made use of war elephants. Buddhist records of the post-Christian period also speak of elephants in these parts, while there are occasional references to their being sent by some of the petty Central Asiatic states as tribute to the court of China. All these statements, however, have to do with tame elephants; and in spite of the enormous difficulty of transporting such bulky animals over the passes between India and Turkestan it is perhaps the case that these animals were all originally obtained from the valley of the Indus. The Chinese writer, Ma T'uan-lin, it is true, speaks of the fauna of the land of the T'iao-chi (who were perhaps the people we know as the Tajiks) in such a way as to imply, apparently, that the elephant was native there; but the passage is too ambiguous to build upon.¹²

That the elephant ever existed during the historic period in any of the great Asiatic islands except Ceylon, Sumatra, and Borneo, where it still occurs, and in Sulu, where it was exterminated by the Moros about a hundred years ago,¹³ there is no reason to believe, although fossil forms occur in them as far north as Japan. In China, however, the case is far otherwise. Here once more we come upon distinct and indisputable references to the elephant, and that too within comparatively recent times.

Three or four thousand years ago, when the ancient culture of the country was taking form in the lower Yellow River Valley,

¹¹ *The Works of Sir William Jones* (London, 1807), vol. 3, p. 146.

¹² Quoted by Rémusat, *Nouveaux mélanges asiatiques*, 1. 206.

¹³ The elephants of Sulu are known to have been feral, and the same is perhaps true of those in North Borneo, although the evidence here is less conclusive. On the latter, see *The China Review*, 7. 3; upon the former, Dr. N. M. Saleeby, 'The History of Sulu,' in *Publications of the Bureau of Science, Division of Ethnology*, vol. 4, part 3, Manila, 1908, pp. 150, 161, 165, 168; also Capt. Thomas Forrest, 'A Voyage to New Guinea,' pp. 320-335; Forrest visited Jolo toward the end of the 18th century.

China north of the Yangtse was a region of wide expanses of grassland, of rolling prairie and flat alluvial plain, with considerable forest, particularly in the hilly districts of the modern Shan-tung and Shan-hsi and western Ho-nan; there were, too, innumerable shallow lakes, reedy meres, and vast extents of swamp. The climate, though continental, was perhaps rather milder than now, and there appears to have been a somewhat greater degree of humidity.

The aspect of the country which we now call southern China was widely different. There, instead of wide alluvial plains, was a picturesque region of mist-veiled hills and quickening streams and blowing woodland, with a warm, moist climate and a very rich vegetation partaking throughout much of the area of a subtropical nature, while in the extreme south its character was, as it still is, genuinely tropical.

This distinction in the aspect of the two halves of the country and the type of their vegetation is reflected too in their fauna. According to Wallace, the bulk of China Proper belongs to the Manchurian subregion of the Palearctic region, while the south is embraced in the Oriental region, the line between the two zoölogical provinces extending roughly along the southern border of the Yangtse valley.¹⁴ In ancient times, however, the boundary appears to have been farther to the north, for many at least of the larger mammalian forms of the Oriental region are found occurring then throughout the Yangtse valley and even to the north of it; among these were the elephant, the rhinoceros, and the tapir.

At the commencement of their true historical period, a little less than three thousand years ago, the ancient Chinese people formed a congeries of semi-independent feudal states located on both sides of the lower course of the Yellow River, under the sway of a ruler of rather primitive king-priest type, and possessing an archaic but very rich Bronze Age civilization.

This ancient culture has of late been attracting no little notice for its achievements in the realm of the aesthetic. Heretofore it has been best known for its splendid sacrificial vessels of bronze, decorated in a highly conventionalized and largely geometric symbolism and unsurpassed anywhere else for their barbaric

¹⁴ A. R. Wallace, *The Geographical Distribution of Animals* (London, 1876), vol. 1, p. 220 *sq.*, and map at beginning of volume.

grandeur and their monumental simplicity and majesty. For our knowledge of the development of Chinese art in other fields we have thus far been dependent upon surviving literary remains; for archæological excavation upon any adequate scale has yet to be undertaken in China. But these written sources are sufficient to show that the high standards attained by the bronze-founder were equalled by the worker in wood, in jade, in silk, in leather, in featherwork, and notably in ivory.

Chinese ivory workers have always stood in the very front rank of their craft. For intricacy and grace of design, for complete mastery of technique, and for skill in execution, some of the modern products of the Canton shops have probably never been excelled. The ancient Chinese work in ivory, with its roots extending far back into prehistoric time,¹⁵ belonged to an entirely different school of art, with designs based primarily upon the same magico-religious symbolism displayed by the great bronze vessels.

The purposes for which ivory was used by the ancient Chinese craftsman, and his manner of using it, were practically the same as was the case in ancient Babylonia and Assyria and Egypt and the old Aegean lands. This parallelism, in fact, extends so far and in such detail, particularly in point of technique, that it is difficult not to feel that there must have been some interchange of ideas, in all probability along the line of the ancient trade route through Central Asia. For instance, in both regions ivory in early times was very extensively used as a decorative inlay on wood; and in both, as the supply became gradually less, the expedient was adopted of replacing it with mother-of-pearl.

Ivory is mentioned in the *Chou-li*, or 'Ritual of the Chou Dynasty,' as one of the 'eight raw materials.' One of the principal uses to which it was put was the adornment of woodwork of various sorts, including chariots of state, which were decorated with a richness hardly equalled in the cars of the warriors of Pharaoh or the heroes of Homer.¹⁶ It was used too in the manufacture of weapons—for bow-tips, archers' thimbles, and sword

¹⁵ The character for 'elephant' (No. 4287, p. 440, in Giles' Dictionary, edit. 1892) has the secondary meanings of 'ivory' and of 'figure' or 'image'; the latter, in spite of the fanciful conjectures of later Chinese scholars, undoubtedly point to the use of ivory for the carving of amulets and the like in very ancient times.

¹⁶ *Le Tcheou-li, ou Rites des Tcheou* (tsl. Edouard Biot, 1851), Bk. 27. 4.

hilts. It also appears in the form of various articles of dress and the toilet, such as amulets, combs, and hairpins; for the Chinese noble of that day wore his hair long and done up in a knot on the top of the head.¹⁷ In the form of a spike, used for untying knots (the ancient Chinese used no buttons in fastening their garments), it was worn suspended at the girdle, its assumption being one of the tokens of maturity.¹⁸ Ivory goblets are also mentioned;¹⁹ and the tyrant Chou Hsin, last ruler of the ancient Shang dynasty, is said to have been the first to employ ivory as the material for his chopsticks. For the present the earliest extant specimens of Chinese worked ivory which we can even approximately date appear to be those accidentally unearthed some years ago at An-yang Hsien, in northern Ho-nan, on the site of one of the capitals of this same dynasty; these are probably of the latter half of the second millennium B. C., and consist of amulets and minor ornaments of very archaic type.

To meet such a demand the supply must have been both large and constant; and, in view of the conditions governing trade in ancient times, it must in all probability have been drawn from some source close at hand. Such, in fact, from the surviving records, we know to have been the case.

That the elephant formerly existed in ancient China Proper itself—that is, in what we know nowadays as North China—is more than probable.²⁰ But it appears to have become quite extinct there by the time of the earliest contemporary historical records that have come down to us—that is, by the beginning of the first millennium B. C.—and to have survived in popular recollection only as one of the dangerous and destructive wild animals of the region which were subdued by the mighty heroes of old. The story that the mythical emperor Shun had elephants to plow his fields and birds to weed the grain²¹ is of course pure folklore; but it suggests at least that in the days when the legend took form elephants were believed to have existed once upon a

¹⁷ *The Book of Odes* (Legge's translation), Pt. 1, Bk. 4. 3.

¹⁸ *Odes*, Pt. 1, Bk. 5. 6.

¹⁹ John Steele, *The I-li* (London, 1917; Probsthain's Oriental Series), 1. 131, 134, 158.

²⁰ Biot (*Journal asiatique*, Dec., 1843) in placing the northern limit of the elephant in ancient China at 28°, was undoubtedly in error, for it can be shown to have extended at least as far north as latitude 35°.

²¹ The legend is quoted in *The Chinese Repository*, 6 (1837), p. 131.

time in northern China. Better authenticated, perhaps, is the statement that the illustrious Duke of Chou, who is believed to have flourished about eleven hundred years before our era, drove away the tigers, leopards, rhinoceroses, and elephants which infested the land in his day.²² His success with the tigers and leopards, unfortunately, was only partial; but that the elephant, and perhaps, too, the rhinoceros, disappeared from northern China at about that time is probable enough.

This legendary evidence regarding the former existence of the elephant in northern China is confirmed in a measure by the extremely early occurrence of the written character denoting that animal; the importance of the creature in the life of the people is indicated by this very fact that it had devoted to it one of the extremely small number of primitive pictographs which constituted the Chinese system of writing in the days of its beginnings. Its failure however to pass into mythology as did the alligator and the rhinoceros (memories of which undoubtedly contributed to the later concepts of the dragon and the *k'i-lin*) suggests that so far as the ancient Chinese culture area proper was concerned, its extinction and consequent passing out of the popular imagination must have taken place rather early. The same conclusion must be drawn, too, from the relatively unimportant and scarcely recognizable designs to which it gave rise in the ancient symbolic art. The part which the elephant plays in the popular mythology and art of the present day is of course due to much later Indian and Buddhistic influences.

The written evidence, such as it is, is in entire harmony with the foregoing conclusion. Contemporary mention of the elephant as a native of any of the original Chinese states is wholly lacking. References to ivory, both as a raw material and as a worked product, are, on the other hand, very numerous; but these invariably point to southern regions then quite outside the ancient Chinese culture-area as the source of supply. The *Book of Odes*, one of the oldest of surviving literary remains, tells us that the wild non-Chinese tribes of the Hwai river region paid a tribute which consisted in part of ivory. The same is recorded, by the *Chou-li*, of the districts of Yang and Ching, which between them included pretty much the whole of the Yangtse valley below the

²² Legge, *The Life and Works of Mencius* (London, 1875) Bk. 3, Pt. 2, chap. 9.

famous gorges; this name 'Ching,' by the way, means 'the jungle,' and indicates something of the character of the country in those days; it was in this region, about seven or eight hundred years before our era, that the 'barbarian' kingdom of Ch'u arose. The *Yu-kung*, which in its present form probably dates from a time fairly early in the first millennium B. C., speaks of the 'Country of Docile Elephants' (*Yu-hsiang Chou*²³) in what is now southern Ho-nan; this name, if it means anything at all, rather suggests not only that elephants were found in this section of Central China then, but that they were actually tamed. It is perhaps significant that the non-Chinese state of Ch'u, already mentioned, where, as will presently appear, elephants were tamed, later occupied part of this same region. In the *Shan Hai Ching*, which, whatever the date of its present recension, undoubtedly contains very ancient elements, mention is made of elephants in the Min Mountains, in what is now central Sze-ch'uan, while the *Erh-ya* records them as being plentiful in the Liang range, in the north-eastern part of the same province.²⁴ The *Tso-ch'uen*, a commentary on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* of Confucius, states that there is much ivory in Ch'u,²⁵ and it further tells us that there was a regular trade in ivory and hides—presumably those of the rhinoceros—between Ch'u and China Proper.

It is clear then that whatever may have been the case in prehistoric times, by the middle of the first millennium B. C. the habitat of the elephant in China had become restricted to the Yangtse valley, from Sze-ch'uan to the sea, and the regions still farther south and west, forming a continuous area with those Indo-Chinese lands, such as Burma, the Laos, and Siam, where it still occurs in a native state. It is apparent too that although no part of this vast region came under Chinese political dominance in any real sense of the word until about two centuries before our era, a brisk trade in ivory had long been going on with the more advanced communities of North China, precisely comparable to the old amber trade between the Mediterranean lands and the Baltic.

²³ Terrien de Lacouperie, *The Western Origins of the Ancient Chinese Civilization*, p. 186, note 756.

²⁴ For these and other references to the elephant in the ancient Chinese records, see T. de Lacouperie, *loc. cit.*

²⁵ See Legge's translation, under years 637, 607 B.C.

Although there is some reason to believe that this southern region was originally occupied only by a sparse and very primitive hunting population of negrito affinities, at the time when it begins to come within the purview of history it was inhabited by various Mongoloid stocks, mainly, it would appear, of the Mon-Khmer group. Already, however, the great T'ai, or Shan, race had come into evidence. Exactly where this people originated we do not know; but its strongest and most advanced branches were then located in the valley of the Yangtse.

The latter fact is not without its bearing upon the subject of this paper; for the Shan race has always been associated with the elephant in a peculiarly intimate way. This condition still holds, for nowhere, even in India itself, does this animal occupy such an important place in the life of the people as in the territories still inhabited by the members of the Shan race, such as Siam, for example, or the Shan States. The same, apparently, has been true from prehistoric times, when the center of gravity of the race was in what is now central China, far to the northeast of its present location. The few surviving instances of the taming of the elephant in ancient China refer to regions then under Shan influence. Even the very name used for the creature in many of the languages of eastern Asia is closely akin to, if not actually borrowed from, the Shan word. In Siam it is *chang*; in the British Shan States this becomes *tsang*; in northern China it is pronounced *hsiang*; in Cantonese, *tsöng*; by the Hakkas, *siong*; in Annam, *töng*. The modern Japanese name, *zō*, seems to have come from some form like *dzang*²⁶ and was in all likelihood borrowed from one of the Yangtse River dialects.

The earliest of all the states of the T'aic stock known to us historically was that of Ch'u, already referred to in connection with the ivory trade between the Yangtse valley and ancient China Proper. This state occupied a territory now comprised in the two provinces of Hu-peh and Hu-nan, embracing both banks of the middle Yangtse, and its principal capital was most strategically located not far from the present Ichang, just at the foot of the famous gorges. From the first it was aggressive and warlike, and at various times extended its annexations now northward, at the expense of the old purely Chinese states, now

²⁶ Cf. the Japanese 'Tō,' from the Chinese 'T'ang,' the name of the dynasty which ruled China, A. D. 618-906.

eastward, down the Yangtse, and again far to the south and west, into regions utterly unknown to the ancient Chinese themselves. One of its conquests in the last-named direction looks like a definite and well planned effort to get control of the key to the Indian trade route, the region between the upper waters of the Yangtse and those of the Irawaddy.

Among the various indications pointing to a connection between the ancient inhabitants of Ch'u and the modern peoples of the T'aic stock is the fact that elephants were tamed and kept at their court. Their motive for this does not appear; but we are perhaps justified in surmising that it had a religious basis. Many of the existing branches of the T'ai race believe that every animal has a guardian spirit with mysterious powers for good and ill. There is also a belief among some of the Indo-Chinese peoples that the spirits of deceased chiefs and medicine-men enter into various animals, such as the tiger and the elephant, and continue in these forms to exert their influence on behalf of their people. Ideas such as these occur throughout this region, and are undoubtedly at the back of the custom of reverencing white elephants, as in Burma and Siam. There the Buddhists with their usual syncretizing proclivities claim that the sacred animal is the incarnation of a Buddha;²⁷ but perhaps the Siamese notion that if the white elephant dies the king, too, will die within the year is a trace of an older belief,²⁸ for we are told that anciently the kings of Siam called themselves 'sons of the White Elephant,' and that the proper name of the latter was taboo.²⁹ At all events the peoples of Indo-China are unanimous that the white elephant is a necessary adjunct of royalty, and that the want of one at the court is most ominous.³⁰ Perhaps it was some similar idea that led to the custom of keeping elephants at the court of ancient Ch'u, although it is only fair to say that this is purely surmise. We do know, however, that the beasts were not kept confined, but were tamed, and taught to allow themselves to be driven or led by their keepers.

²⁷ Sir John Bowring, *The Kingdom and People of Siam* (London, 1857), vol. 1, p. 471; Mrs. Ernest Hart, *Picturesque Burma, Past and Present* (London, 1897), p. 167

²⁸ Bowring, *op. cit.* 1. 473 (quoting Père Bruguière, *Annales de la Foi*, XXV.)

²⁹ *Ibid.* 1. 473 *sq.*

³⁰ Mrs. L. J. Curtis, *The Laos of North Siam* (Philadelphia, 1903), p. 95.

Toward the close of the sixth century B. C. Ch'u was invaded and for the moment overrun by the state of Wu, or, as the word was perhaps then pronounced, Ngu, another non-Chinese kingdom located lower down the Yangtse with its capital at the modern Soochow. Defeated in the field, the armies of Ch'u took refuge behind the walls of their capital; but these (doubtless of rammed earth) were overthrown by the invaders, who directed against them the waters of the Siang River. As a last resort, we are told, the king of Ch'u then took his elephants and tied torches to their tails and urged them against the inrushing enemy, but to no avail.³¹

This is the sole reference, so far as I am aware, to the use of the elephant in war in ancient China. That such use was a customary one seems unlikely; for in the first place, had it been so we should almost certainly have heard of other instances of it, as for example in the great work 'On the Art of War,' by Sun-Tzü, written just about this time. Moreover, the defeated king would scarcely, in such case, have turned to his elephants only as a last resort; while the method of urging them against the foe by the use of fire seems rather a counsel of despair. It is curious to note that the general of another Shan state, Siam, in the course of a war with Cochin China, over two thousand years later, made use of precisely the same stratagem, attacking the enemy's camp with several hundred elephants to whose tails burning torches were tied; in this instance the device met with better success, and over a thousand of the enemy were destroyed.³²

The sole trustworthy reference that I have found to the use of the elephant in any of the arts of peace in ancient China relates to the construction of a tomb for a member of the royal family of Wu, the other non-Chinese state just mentioned as being at war with Ch'u; and here we are merely informed that these animals were employed in the execution of the work, no details being given, and no clue of any kind enabling us to learn whether the practice was a usual one or not.³³

All that we can be certain of then is that the ancient non-Chinese peoples of the Yangtse basin not merely hunted the ele-

³¹ P. Albert Tschèpe, S.J., *Histoire du Royaume de Tch'ou* (Changhai, 1903), p. 263 and note 5.

³² Bowring, *op. cit.* 1. 221.

³³ Prof. E. H. Parker, *Ancient China Simplified* (London, 1908), p. 258.

phant for his ivory and perhaps his skin, but that they also caught and tamed him and kept him at court. This, however, seems to have been the extent of their practice, and in fact it is perhaps the case that the two instances just cited of the utilization of the creature in any way further than this have found a place in the records precisely on account of their exceptional character. That certain Indo-Chinese peoples did eventually learn to make use of the elephant in various ways, and notably in war, is true.³⁴ But this development did not take place until considerably later, and appears to have been connected in some way with the great expansion of Indian influence in the Bay of Bengal and adjacent regions, in times shortly preceding and following the commencement of the Christian Era. That it did not take place upon Chinese soil is certain, and although the use of elephants in war and pageantry was later introduced into China, it was only as an exotic custom, which no more took root there than it did in Mediterranean regions.

With the great increase of civilization in the Yangtse valley about the middle of the first millennium B. C. the elephant underwent a swift diminution in numbers. Its complete extinction there before the close of the 4th century B. C. may perhaps be inferred from a remark of a minister of Ch'u, who in the year 308 B. C. is recorded as speaking of the stag as the noblest of the beasts of chase,³⁵ and this he would scarcely have done had animals like the elephant and the rhinoceros still survived in the country.

In the regions farther to the west and south, however, the case was far otherwise. It is perhaps significant that the order in which the elephant disappeared in these various areas coincides exactly with that in which they were taken possession of by Chinese civilization. In the modern Sze-ch'uan, where, as we have already seen, elephants are noticed by the earlier Chinese records as numerous, they must have been found well into the period of the Han Dynasty (206 B. C.-220 A. D.), for we read that they were sent by the native chiefs as tribute to the Chinese

³⁴ MacGowan, *The Imperial History of China*, p. 210, mentions an instance in Cochin China in the 5th century A. D. The terror inspired among the Chinese soldiers on this occasion suggests that the elephant was quite unknown to them at that period.

³⁵ Tschèpe, *op. cit.* p. 318.

court, at Ch'ang-an (in the modern Shen-hsi), where they were kept in the Imperial menagerie.³⁶ It is perhaps worth noting that it was under this dynasty that the elephant was first introduced into Chinese art in a naturalistic way, in distinction from the far more ancient symbolic and almost unrecognizably conventionalized designs to which it had given rise in the old hieratic art. After the Han Dynasty, notices regarding the elephant as indigenous to Sze-ch'uan apparently cease, and no doubt about that time it underwent there too the extinction which had already overtaken it in the lower portions of the Yangtse valley.

The 'Two Kwang' provinces (Kwang-tung and Kwang-hsi) though annexed long before, were not absorbed by the Chinese in any real sense until after the advent of the T'ang Dynasty, in the 7th century. Elephants had always been numerous in these tropical southern regions. It was no doubt because of this fact that the great Ch'in Shih Huang-ti gave to the province into which he erected the extreme southern portion of his vast dominions the name of Hsiang Kiun, or 'Commandery of the Elephants.' Under the Han Dynasty, just mentioned, which succeeded the Ch'in at the close of the 3rd century B. C., a portion of northern Kwang-hsi was known as Hsiang Chou, or 'District of the Elephants.'³⁷ The *Shuo-wén*, of the close of the first century A. D., defines the elephant as 'a large beast with long proboscis and tusks, occurring in Kiang-nan.'³⁸ The province of Kiang-nan under the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644 A. D.) consisted of the two modern provinces of An-hui and Kiang-hsi, lying athwart the lower Yangtse and representing roughly the old barbarian kingdom of Wu. But the Kiang-nan of the time of the *Shuo-wén* was undoubtedly literally the region 'South of the Yangtse,' as the name signifies. That this was so that work itself indicates in another place, where it states more specifically that the elephant occurs in Nan-Yüeh, a region now represented by the 'Two Kwang' provinces. Here, it appears, it long persisted, for it is said to have been numerous in southern Kwang-tung in the 7th century, while as late as the 10th we find elephants employed in putting to death criminals at Canton,³⁹ then the capital of a semi-independent kingdom.

³⁶ A. Wylie, *Journal of the Anthropological Institute*, 11 (1882), p. 113.

³⁷ Dr. S. Wells Williams, *Syllabic Dictionary* (Shanghai, 1874), p. 792.

³⁸ Cf. Rev. Frank H. Chalfant, 'Early Chinese Writing' (*Memoirs of the Carnegie Museum*, vol. 4, no. 1, Sept., 1906), plate I.

³⁹ See article in *The Chinese Repository*, 2. (1833), p. 151.

The evidence of place-names, so far as I have been able to trace it, confirms what we glean from the written records. Such names having to do with the elephant are, so far as my notes indicate, almost wholly absent in northern China, while in the south and west they are by no means unknown. Among such are Ta Hsiang Ling and Hsiao Hsiang Ling ('Great Elephant Pass' and 'Little Elephant Pass', respectively) in Sze-ch'uan, west of Mt. Omei; Hsiang Po ('Elephant Neck'), a hamlet in the extreme west of Yün-nan; and Hsiang Shan ('Elephant Hill'), near Canton. Many of these names now have attached to them explanations drawn from the exploits of Buddhist saints or popular heroes;⁴⁰ but in most instances, as is usually true in such cases, the names are doubtless far older than the explanations.

It was in Yün-nan that the elephant survived longer than anywhere else in the region now comprised within the boundaries of the Chinese Republic.⁴¹ It is barely possible, in fact, that it may still occur in the forests at one point just within the south-western border of that province.⁴² In Yün-nan there sprang up, shortly before the Christian Era, another center of Shan culture, which lasted, through various vicissitudes and changes of dynasty, until the 13th century, when it was swamped by the great Mongol flood which overwhelmed so much of Asia and Europe at that time. As in all Shan countries, so here too the elephant played an important part in the life of both rulers and people, in court pageantry, as a riding animal, and as a bearer of burdens.⁴³ That it was native to the region and not drawn from Burma or other Indo-Chinese regions, as was the case with the elephants used by the Chinese emperors in later times, we know from various historical references. It would appear from the statements of Marco Polo that the Shan people of Yün-nan did not employ

⁴⁰ See, e.g., R. F. Johnston, *Peking to Mandalay* (London, 1908), p. 421, note 14.

⁴¹ Cf. Navarette, 'Account of the Empire of China,' in Churchill, *Voyages* (London, 1744), vol. 1, chap. 17 (p. 37); 'In the province of Jun-nan there are very good elephants bred.'

⁴² L. Richard, *A Comprehensive Geography of the Chinese Empire and its Dependencies* (Shanghai, 1908; trsl. by M. Kennelly, S.J.), p. 17; A. R. Colquhoun, *Across Chrysē*, vol. 2, p. 65; Major H. R. Davies, *Yun-nan*, pp. 86, 134; Fred W. Carey, 'Notes of a Journey Overland from Szemao to Rangoon,' *Journal of the North-China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 36 (1905), p. 6.

⁴³ Prof. E. H. Parker, 'Early Laos and China,' *China Review*, Sept.-Oct., 1890.

the elephant in war; for he asserts categorically that the Mongols encountered war-elephants for the first time at the battle of 'Unciam' (Yung-ch'ang),⁴⁴ which they fought against the Burmese in 1277,⁴⁵ after they had completed the overthrow of the Shan kingdom in Yün-nan. That war-elephants were later used in that province, however, in the Ming Dynasty, we know; notably was this the case with the last scion of that house to offer resistance to the conquering Manchus in the middle of the 17th century; he, we are told, raised in Yün-nan, whither he had fled, an army of 200,000 men and 600 elephants; but the latter, the account goes on to state, did more hurt to their own side than to that of the enemy.⁴⁶ It must have been not long after this period that the elephant practically disappeared from this remote western province, its last refuge on Chinese soil; for the Manchu emperors were forced to draw for those which they maintained at their court in Peking upon regions outside of China Proper.⁴⁷

Thus the fate which overtook the elephant in both the eastern and the western extremities of its ancient habitat has been precisely the same. It would appear, indeed, that it can maintain itself in the presence of man only in regions which have not advanced beyond the hunting and planting stage of cultural evolution, and where the demand for ivory is purely local and relatively slight. Once true agriculture and intertribal commerce are introduced, the creature's fate is sealed. In China, just as in Mesopotamia and Syria, the growth of population and the ceaseless demand for ivory combined to bring about the extinction of this great animal, almost the last of the tribes of giant mammals that roamed over the globe during the Tertiary. While it existed, however, there can be no doubt that the ivory trade played a part in the diffusion of the Chinese type of civilization among the peoples of southeastern Asia quite comparable to the influence of the ancient amber trade in early Europe or to that of the modern ivory trade in Africa, where conditions are no doubt in many respects similar to those which existed in the protohistoric period in what is now South China.

⁴⁴ Colquhoun, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 277.

⁴⁵ Yule and Cordier, *Marco Polo*, vol. 2, p. 104 and note 3.

⁴⁶ Navarette, in Churchill, *Voyages*, 1, 338.

⁴⁷ Cf. *The Chinese Repository*, vol. 9 (1840), pp. 453, 470.